

Ideology or Insanity?

Media Portrayal of Ted Kaczynski and Tim McVeigh

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Contents

Introduction	4
Theory	6
Method	9
Findings	11
Portrayals of Ted Kaczynski	11
Portrayals of Timothy McVeigh	15
Conclusion	19
Appendix	24
Kaczynski	24
McVeigh	25
References	27

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by

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Introduction

Almost twenty years ago, on the morning of April 19, 1995, a massive explosion sheared off a large chunk of Oklahoma City's Murrah Federal Building, killing 168 people, including 19 children, and injuring 500. What motivated the man, Timothy J. McVeigh, who was eventually convicted of this act? According to *The New York Times*, McVeigh acted 'in the service of ideology' (Goodman, 1997). Just five days later, on April 24th, a bomb exploded in a Sacramento, California office, killing timber industry lobbyist Gilbert B. Murray. This was the final explosion in a string of mail bombs dating back to 1978, resulting in three deaths and 23 injuries. What motivated the man, Theodore J. Kaczynski, better known as 'The Unabomber,' who was eventually convicted of these acts? According to *The New York Times*, Kaczynski's actions were the result of individual psychological abnormality: he acted in the service of 'an inner psychological need' (Johnston, 1995). In other words, Kaczynski's actions were attributed to psychological illness. He was not portrayed as a politically or ideologically motivated actor. The twentieth anniversary of the bombing of the Murrah Federal Building and the final bombing in the 'Unabomber' case provide an opportunity to look back at mainstream media coverage of these two compelling and important cases in recent United States history.

More specifically, these events and the character and motivation of the men responsible for them present an interesting opportunity to compare mainstream mass media coverage of the Theodore J. Kaczynski and Timothy J. McVeigh bombings, paying special attention to the media's use and application of medical terminology. More specific still, these events provide an opportunity to wed two distinct lines of inquiry: The mass media research of Herman and Chomsky (2002) and Conrad and Schneider's (1980) research on 'medicalization,' the process whereby conditions, behaviors, and actions come to be attributed to various forms of illness. The marriage of these research lines is grounded in a comparative qualitative content analysis of *The New York Times's* and *Time's* portrayals of Theodore J. Kaczynski and Timothy J. McVeigh and their actions.

Critical analysis of mass media and the images, frames, and portrayals it presents are important because the media play a major role in constructing our consciousness of the world: 'News media are a major source of cultural production and information. Their representations of the social world provide explanations, descriptions, and frames for understanding how and why the world works as it does' (Hall, 1982:35). In providing explanations of events and playing such a large role in the construction of our worldviews, the mass media serve a social control or 'propaganda' function, espe-

cially 'in a world of concentrated wealth and major conflicts of class interest' (Herman and Chomsky, 1988:1). The mass media do not just describe events, they also give an explanation as to why those events occurred. As with the media, the primary significance of medicalization lies in its social control function. In fact, medicalization may have become the main agent of social control (Conrad and Schneider, 1980) as it serves to individualize motives and to take actions out of their social and cultural contexts. This research focuses on how *The New York Times*, the most important and influential paper in the United States, and *Time*, the nation's most widely distributed weekly newsmagazine, portrayed Ted Kaczynski and Tim McVeigh and explained the motivations for their actions.

Theory

Centering on several case studies, Herman and Chomsky employ the idea of 'dichotomous coverage' to investigate the differences in treatment of situations broadly similar in character, except for the political and economic interests at stake: 'Our expectation is that news as well as editorial opinion will be strongly influenced by those interests and should display a predictable bias' (Herman and Chomsky, 2002: xix). More simply, the media are expected to treat similar cases in a dichotomous manner depending on their relation to vested power interests. For example, Herman and Chomsky predicted that people who were victimized by governments that are looked upon unfavorably by the United States will be found 'worthy' and will receive more intense and sympathetic coverage than those victimized by the United States or its 'client states,' who are 'unworthy' (Herman & Chomsky 2002: xix-xx). Herman and Chomsky compared the murder of a Polish priest, Jerzy Popieluszko, to the murder of priests and nuns by agents of United States 'client states' in Central America. Coverage of the 'worthy' Popieluszko was voluminous and sympathetic, while coverage of the 'unworthy' murdered priests, nuns, and other victims in Central America was scant and much less sympathetic or nonexistent.

To give a further illustration, Herman and Chomsky analyzed media coverage of elections in El Salvador and Nicaragua during the 1980s. The mainstream media followed a United States foreign policy agenda in covering elections in 'client and disfavored states' (Herman & Chomsky 2002: xxiv). Again, their findings reveal dichotomization. *The New York Times's* coverage of the Nicaraguan elections planned for 1984 focused on such issues as freedom of the press, free speech, and freedom of assembly, whereas their coverage of the elections in El Salvador the same year made almost no mention of these freedoms, or lack thereof. This frame and contour in media coverage was expected, for Nicaragua was an 'enemy state,' whereas El Salvador was a United States 'client state.' Finally, they note that this differential coverage and portrayal was forcefully and clearly demonstrated in subsequent elections in Cambodia, Yugoslavia, Kenya, Mexico, Russia, Turkey and Uruguay (Herman & Chomsky 2002: xxv).

Each of these case study analyses dealt with the extent and type of media coverage of international events, yet Herman and Chomsky indicate that such analyses could be fruitfully applied to coverage of domestic issues, explaining media coverage and portrayal of NAFTA and labor issues; the chemical industry and its regulation; the 'health insurance controversy' of 1992-93 (2002: xlviii); the 'drug wars'; and the Seattle and Washington, D.C. World Trade Organization protests of 1999 and 2000 (2002). Herman and Chomsky have not, however, investigated the comparative coverage and

portrayals of two individuals who committed crimes broadly similar and who both claimed to have committed these crimes out of different political motives or ideologies.

The medicalization of deviance is the process whereby problems, behaviors, or social conditions come to be portrayed as caused by disease or illness; that is, they are defined as medical problems. This assumption impacts society's understanding of and response to the problem. According to Conrad, 'The key to medicalization is the definitional issue. Medicalization consists of defining a problem in medical terms, using medical language to describe a problem,' and 'adopting a medical framework to understand a problem...' (Conrad, 1992: 211). The 'definitional issue' is an important one, as a variety of explanations are often culturally available. That is, a particular action, problem, or condition may be defined as being caused by illness, social conditions, or political motivation. According to Szasz, medicalization of the personal, the social, and the political are a 'pervasive characteristic of the modern age' (Szasz, 1970: 5).

The point is that various labels are available for describing and defining acts, behaviors, and problems. Did political motivation, the effects of mental illness, or actions of the devil lead McVeigh and Kaczynski to undertake their symbolic and devastating bombings? Under the medicalization of deviance, acts are said to be caused by illness. Conceiving of deviant behavior as caused by illness leads to emphasis and focus on the individual. It de-emphasizes rational motivation, human agency, and the contextual external environment, and in so doing, 'locates the source of deviant behavior within the individual' (Conrad & Schneider, 1980: 35).

Medicalization research has focused 'on the production of definitions, their use, and the consequences of that use' (Conrad & Schneider, 1992: 278) as a mechanism of social control. To date, however, little research has paid attention to the intersection of the media and medicalization with regard to depoliticization and social control, though several researchers have noted the role of the media in medicalization processes.

Conrad and Schneider (1980), for example, have noted that while the criminal justice system is typically understood to be the main institution and agent of social control, the mass media serve this function as well through the influencing of public perception and the social construction of reality and, in his work on Viagra and the passive medicalization of erectile dysfunction, Carpiano says that 'news programs and newspaper articles' were 'arguably' more responsible in promoting the medicalization of erectile dysfunction than the pharmaceutical industry (2001: 447). The mass media has also played a role in the medicalization of impotence. According to Tiefer (1994), the mass media served as one of four claims makers who promoted this medicalization. More specifically, she analyzed the role of the media in defining for the public what constitutes an acceptable body and in getting people to accept, adopt, and internalize medicalized definitions. The use of medicalized language by the mass media was instrumental. Furthermore, psychiatrist Thomas Szasz has explained the mass media's role in the medicalization and depoliticization of individuals: '...not only the psychiatric and allied professions, [but] the newspapers...are imbued with and purvey the ideology of mental health and illness' (Szasz, 1970: 75).

In summary, I have focused on the critical mass media research of Herman and Chomsky as well as Conrad and Schneider's concept of medicalization. Herman and Chomsky provide quantitative and qualitative evidence of media distortion and uneven coverage. The strength of their analysis lies in the notion of 'dichotomous' media coverage, whereby otherwise similar cases are presented differently based on their relation to vested power interests. They have not, however, discussed or even identified the uneven application of medical terminology by the mass media. On the other hand, Conrad and Schneider specifically, and the medicalization literature generally, have identified and discussed the application of medical terminology and labels to depoliticize behavior, yet little research has identified or discussed in more than a cursory way the mass media's role in this process. This research draws together these two distinct lines of research, wedding Herman and Chomsky's idea of 'dichotomous coverage' to mass media application of medical terminology, leading to an investigation of the media's uneven application of medical labels.

Method

Two leading national news publications were examined in this research, one daily and one weekly. Selecting to analyze *The New York Times* and *Time* was based on theoretical and practical considerations. As a daily 'paper of record,' *The New York Times* is well respected and believed to be a leading forum for the formulation of elite opinion. What *The New York Times* says carries weight. According to Merrill, it is 'a national and world leader in the area of journalism' and 'principal newspaper of record in the United States' (1983:310). The choice of a weekly newsmagazine came down to three possibilities: *Time*, *Newsweek*, or *US News and World Report*. I chose *Time* because, with a circulation of almost four million, it is the most widely distributed of the three publications, with almost double the circulation of *US News and World Report* and a million more than *Newsweek* ('U.S. News names,' 2001).

Using the advanced search option on Lexxus-Nexxus, I searched for all articles in *The New York Times* that contained the keywords 'Ted Kaczynski,' 'Unabomber,' and 'Timothy McVeigh.' For purposes of analysis I included only articles of 250 words or more, beginning with the first mention of either Kaczynski, Unabomber, or McVeigh, and ending with the judge's sentencing of Kaczynski and with the jury's sentence of death for McVeigh. *The New York Times* published 132 articles on Kaczynski and 314 articles on McVeigh that met these parameters.

Though *The New York Times* and many other daily and weekly publications were in the Lexxus-Nexxus database, *Time* magazine was not. I was able to access *Time*'s articles on Kaczynski and McVeigh through Infotrac. Again, using the same keywords and including articles from the first mention of their names through their sentencing, I located 26 articles on Kaczynski and 29 articles on McVeigh.

The Kaczynski articles ran from December 12, 1994 to May 18, 1998, while articles on McVeigh ran from May 1, 1995 to June 23, 1997. The date and complete headline was recorded for each article. In addition, for *The New York Times* articles, the section of the newspaper in which the article appeared, and whether or not it was an editorial, was recorded. For the *Time* articles, I recorded whether or not the article was a cover story.

For each of the 501 articles I recorded whether or not the article portrayed either Kaczynski or McVeigh as psychologically abnormal or mentally ill and whether or not a political or ideological motivation was attributed to the actor in question. For example, if Kaczynski were defined as psychologically 'abnormal' or mentally ill in an article, I wrote 'yes' in the psychologically 'abnormal' column and then recorded, in the same column, the language used to portray him as such.

Having settled on the categories of psychologically 'abnormal' or 'mentally ill' and 'political or ideological motivation,' a set of indicators that determined whether or not an attribute was present and into which category it fell had to be devised (Nachmias & Nachmias, 1992). Constructing operational definitions for the category 'political or ideological motivation' was relatively simple. After reading the first twenty-five New York Times articles on Kaczynski and McVeigh, word lists of terms identifying the concept were constructed (Holsti, 1969). I had to assess whether or not an article attributed a political or ideological motivation to these men which might be seen as a basis for their actions. If an article on Kaczynski contained one of the following words, the article, for purposes of coding, was defined as having attributed to him a political or ideological commitment which might have motivated his actions: 'anarchist,' 'environmentalist,' and 'left.' Variations of these words, such as 'anarchism,' 'environmentalism,' and 'leftist' were also accepted as attributing to Kaczynski a political ideology.

The following words were used as operational definitions in assessing whether or not a political or ideological commitment was attributed to McVeigh: 'right,' or a variation of this word, such as 'right-wing' or 'rightist;' 'patriot;' and 'militia.' If any one of these words or their variations appeared in an article on McVeigh, it was coded as attributing to McVeigh a political or ideological motivation. Finally, 'psychologically abnormal' or 'mentally ill' had to be operationalized. Again, rather than hoping the data would fit these operational definitions, the operational definitions emerged from the news media articles themselves. Instead of using a pre-defined list of terms, each article was read, and if either Kaczynski or McVeigh was portrayed as 'psychologically abnormal' or 'mentally ill', the words which were used in this depiction were recorded. A complete list of all such terms appears in the Appendix.

Findings

Portrayals of Ted Kaczynski

Throughout their coverage both publications specifically depoliticized Kaczynski's acts, his behavior and his political ideology by attributing his actions to psychological abnormality. Second, Kaczynski's rejection of the labels 'mentally ill' and 'schizophrenic' were taken as evidence of his illness. However, qualitative analysis revealed a strong countervailing tendency. While Kaczynski was consistently defined as abnormal, there were times when, particularly *The New York Times* put forward forceful claims rejecting the notion that Kaczynski was psychologically unbalanced.

The very first *New York Times* article portrayed Kaczynski as someone striking out at demons, in spite of labeling him an 'anarchist'. The motivation for his actions was being located within his psyche. He was not someone motivated by politics and ideology: 'We'd like to hear from this guy if he's got some sort of an agenda, said the San Francisco Postal Inspector. But I doubt he's that focused, other than to strike out at whatever demons he's striking out at' (Long-running Unabom, 1995).

However, later a *New York Times* editorial, that ran after Kaczynski sent several letters to newspapers outlining his general view of the industrial revolution and technology, put forth a more complicated picture of the Unabomber: He was taken as a serious thinker, but he was depoliticized and medicalized as well in the same article. The author, Kirkpatrick Sale, a well-known environmentalist and technology critic, was at first emphatic: the bomber was not a nut. Sale acknowledged the legitimacy of Kaczynski's arguments, strongly noting their resonance with sectors of the public and connecting Kaczynski to a 'long political tradition,' including Dickens, Thoreau, Veblen, and Weber. Later, however, he states the bomber was 'evidently disturbed' and 'obviously measurably unbalanced' (Sale, 1995).

Time went so far as to speculate that Kaczynski's actions could be attributed to an illness he suffered in childhood.

Was Ted different almost from the start? Investigators say that at the age of six months he was hospitalized for several weeks after suffering an allergic reaction to a drug. During that time, his parents were not allowed to hold or hug him. When he came home, they found him listless and withdrawn (Lacayo, 1996).

He sent bombs not because he was a politically motivated actor, but because he had suffered an early childhood illness or was mentally ill.

Time, in coverage from November 17, 1997, set a pattern: until Kaczynski pled guilty and was sentenced, his refusal to accept the label of mental illness generally, and paranoid schizophrenic specifically, was itself evidence of mental illness. The following quote reveals this dynamic:

Kaczynski's defense strategy is in turmoil. The first public sign of trouble was the Harvard graduate's abrupt refusal to be examined by prosecution psychiatrists. But *Time* has learned that he initially resisted examination by even his own doctors. They had planned to argue that Kaczynski suffers from paranoid schizophrenia... But if the jury in this case is allowed to hear details about paranoid schizophrenia, they may see some disturbing parallels with Kaczynski's life. For example, psychiatrists say true schizophrenics often resist diagnosis. 'They don't like to think of themselves as mentally ill,' says Dr. Ira Glick, a Professor of Psychiatry at Stanford. 'They'd think something else caused their problems, like bad parenting or bad government or too many drugs—anything but being labeled crazy' (Jackson, 1997).

Kaczynski's 'lawyers had planned to argue that he suffered from paranoid schizophrenia....But paranoid schizophrenics typically resist being labeled mentally ill, and Kaczynski proved to be all too typical' (Jackson, 1998).

Not everyone believed Kaczynski was mentally ill, however, or that his actions were motivated by schizophrenia. In a *New York Times* editorial noted political scientist James Q. Wilson clearly and forcefully attempted to pull Kaczynski back into a political context. According to Wilson:

If Mr. Kaczynski is as competent today as he was over the 10 years when prosecutors say he killed three people and injured 28 others, he is highly rational. There is nothing in the manifesto that looks at all like the work of a madman. The language is clear, precise and calm. The argument is subtle and carefully developed, lacking anything even faintly resembling the wild claims or irrational speculation that a lunatic might produce. If it is the work of a madman, then the writings of many political philosophers—Jean Jacques Rousseau, Tom Paine, Karl Marx—are scarcely more sane (Wilson, 1998).

Wilson's opinion regarding Kaczynski, however, was drowned out. The following day Kaczynski's refusal to cooperate with defense lawyers was again underscored as evidence of his illness. On January 21, The *Times* reported that Dr. Sally Johnson, a court-appointed psychiatrist proclaimed Kaczynski competent to stand trial despite suffering from 'serious mental illness,' including 'schizophrenia, paranoid type.' Clearly, The *Times* desired to end speculation as to Kaczynski's mental state. Dr. Johnson labeled him a paranoid schizophrenic, the same label applied by Kaczynski's defense team, who had a vested interest in their client being defined as mentally ill in order to avoid a death sentence. The *Times* defined this as 'expert consensus'.

The final claim that Kaczynski was not mentally ill was neutralized by reference to the authority of the medical model:

Advocates of the death penalty for Mr. Kaczynski have said that his ability to create bizarre legal problems is evidence that he is clever and sane. But the medical

evaluations show otherwise. Public safety and the interests of humane justice are best served by a life sentence without parole ('Justice in the Unibomber Case,' 1998).

The New York Times and *Time* were much more likely to attribute a political ideology and motivation to McVeigh than Kaczynski. Qualitative analysis, however, revealed that even when a political ideology was attributed to Kaczynski, his actions were in the same article often medicalized. In the initial *New York Times* article, though an ideology was attributed to the Unabomber, he was depoliticized and medicalized: 'In a letter to *The New York Times* in June 1993, the bomber said he belonged to an anarchist group.' However, later in the same paragraph the Unabomber was said to be 'striking out at demons.' The actions of the Unabomber were not defined as politically or ideologically motivated ('Long-running Unabom,' 1995).

On May 7, 1995, *The Times* ran an interesting article which presented the actions of the Unabomber as politically and ideologically motivated. The article featured an interview with anarchist author John Zerzan, who called the Unabomber's letter to *The Times* 'a pretty thoroughgoing critique.' *The Times* presented Zerzan's ideas at some length, adding: 'The serial bomber expressed a similar ideal in his letter to *The Times*' (Noble, 1995b). This article also made reference to the 'anarchist movement': 'No one appears to know how big or far-flung that network is—Mr. Zerzan himself says he does not know—but Oregon and Northern California, dotted by a number of anarchist bookstores and reading rooms, are believed to be its center.' This article represents a specific acknowledgement that the Unabomber had an ideology, that he was politically and ideologically motivated, making future non-coverage and discussion of anarchism all the more glaring. Also, though there was reference to an 'anarchist movement,' there was no more discussion of it in *The New York Times* or *Time*, though Kaczynski would not be arrested for another eleven months.

The next article, which appeared in *Time*, was the first in a series featuring the intersection of ideology and abnormality. Specifically, in this and other articles, the Unabomber's ideology, sometimes identified as anarchist, sometimes not, was taken as evidence of personal abnormality. Coverage of Kaczynski with regard to personal abnormality revealed clear depoliticization and medicalization. The depoliticization and medicalization to which I refer in this and following paragraphs seems more blatant, as it is specifically Kaczynski's ideology which was depoliticized and medicalized. *Penthouse* publisher Bob Guccione said the following regarding the printing of the Unabomber's article, later known as 'Industrial Society and Its Future': 'I would do it in an instant. This is the philosophical ramblings of a tortured mind' (Lemonick, 1995). This differs from other articles, as will become clear, in which Kaczynski's behavior in court or his refusal to cooperate with his lawyers was taken as evidence of illness. Here, his very ideology, usually as expressed in his writing, was taken as evidence of abnormality and sickness.

When the Unabomber made it known that he would stop sending mail bombs if his 37,000-word article were published it was front-page news. Interestingly, there were no

claims that the document was a manifestation of abnormality on the part of its author. According to *The Times*, in fact, the article was:

A 62 page, single-spaced document that often reads like a closely reasoned scholarly tract, touching on politics, history, sociology and science as it posits a cataclysmic struggle between freedom and technology. The document, mixing revolutionary rhetoric and back-to-nature-sentiments in a blend that might have come from Trotsky or Thoreau... (McFadden, 1995c).

Later, after Kaczynski was apprehended, the same document was reported as a manifestation of abnormality.

The New York Times published an article on the FBI's search for the Unabomber among the leftist community in the San Francisco Bay Area in which the Unabomber's actions were clearly set in a political context: the words 'anarchist,' 'leftist,' and 'radical environmentalist'" were used. Then, out of seemingly nowhere, the actions of the Unabomber were depoliticized and medicalized. A self-described leftist and environmentalist said the bomber was 'sick' (Noble, 1995a).

When *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* published Kaczynski's article it was front-page news in *The Times*. The Unabomber's call 'for revolution against the industrial and technological underpinnings of society...' was reported, the title of the article was identified, and it was described as 'closely reasoned.' The article '... touched on politics, history, sociology, science and particularly the history of science and called for a nonpolitical revolution in which factories would be destroyed, books burned and humanity saved from economic and technological slavery' (McFadden, 1995d). However, as in other articles, no ideology was attributed to the Unabomber. Was he an anarchist? A leftist? A radical environmentalist? *The Times* did not say.

After the publication of *Industrial Society and Its Future* the authorities were 'revising important assumptions' about the author. Specifically, he was no longer said to be a politically motivated actor, though neither *The New York Times* nor *Time* were ever committed to that definition, as the preceding pages make clear. The article stated:

...the authorities are revising important assumptions about the background and motives of the criminal...interviews with investigators and academics who are closely following the case suggest that the 35,000 word manuscript is the work of a man whose profile more closely fits that of a serial murderer than a domestic terrorist with a political agenda...Instead, they now regard him as a serial murderer who kills to satisfy an inner psychological need. (Johnston, 1995a).

This interpretation of the Unabomber was repeated on *The New York Times*'s front page: Kaczynski was no longer '...a disciplined terrorist with a political aim... but a driven serial killer whose bombs fulfilled a psychological need' (Johnston, 1996).

On January 12, specific reference was again made, in a *Time* article, to Kaczynski's writings in labeling him 'nuts.' According to a 'high ranking Justice Department official': 'This man is a cold-blooded killer. Read his writing. Any serial killer is nuts' (Jackson, 1998). Clearly, this article depoliticized and medicalized Kaczynski: his writ-

ing was taken as a manifestation of illness. He was not a politically and ideologically motivated actor.

Soon thereafter we read that court-appointed psychiatrist Dr. Sally Johnson has officially applied the mental illness label to Kaczynski in the form of paranoid schizophrenia, but she also pronounced him competent to stand trial. 'The Unabom campaign' was blamed on mental illness (Glaberson, 1998). The alleged actions of Kaczynski were said to have been caused by mental illness rather than political motivation, thereby de-politicizing and medicalizing the actions of Ted Kaczynski. Time repeated and accepted the claims of Dr. Johnson that Kaczynski was a delusional paranoid schizophrenic. Theodore J. Kaczynski, the Unabomer, 'the self-styled scourge of society' was 'mentally ill' (Edwards, 1998).

Portrayals of Timothy McVeigh

A front page article from *The New York Times* set a pattern which endured throughout *The Times's* and *Time's* coverage: McVeigh's alleged abnormalities were cast as political. Here, and in many of the following articles, he was said to be 'obsessed' with the date April 19, 1995, the date the Waco siege ended in the deaths of 56 Branch Davidians (McFadden, 1995a.).

The New York Times editorial page followed the same pattern, casting McVeigh's alleged abnormalities as political abnormalities rather than mental or psychological in nature. The opening paragraph stated: 'Can the Oklahoma City bombing be the product of a rage against the federal government so paranoid and demented that those in its grip thought to strike a blow for freedom by demolishing a federal building, killing scores of innocent individuals inside?' ('A twisted rage,' 1995). 'Paranoid' and 'demented' were here used in a political context. There was no suggestion that those responsible for the bombing of the Murrah Federal Building were actually mentally ill.

On April 26, *The New York Times* ran an article under the byline 'Many Theories About Choice of Target,' which speculated that the Murrah Federal Building may have been specifically targeted because of its on-site day-care center, which was demolished in the blast, killing 19 children, an aspect of the bombing which received a good deal of media coverage. Neither *The New York Times* nor *Time* took in this portrayal an opportunity to speculate that McVeigh might have been psychologically disturbed or mentally unbalanced. Neither of these publications even posed the question, let alone attempted to substantiate it. One might, for example, have raised the issue somewhere in the following argument which appeared in *The Times*:

And in plainly the most diabolical theory of all, the Murrah building may have been chosen specifically because its layout insured that a bomb could be placed so close to children, in the America's Kids day-care center on the second floor. Federal buildings elsewhere in the south-central United States, including Dallas, Denver and

Kansas City, Mo., either do not have day-care centers or place them in areas somewhat less accessible to a bomb (Verhovek, 1995).

Neither *The New York Times* nor *Time* even raised the issue of whether or not the person or people responsible were psychologically abnormal. The children who died in the blast were mentioned on the front page of *The New York Times* on April 29, 1995, but there was no speculation as to McVeigh's mental state. This failure to pose what might be considered a very obvious, legitimate, and relevant question was highlighted by the many questions this article did pose. In all, about twenty questions were posed of McVeigh, none of which dealt with whether he was abnormal. The questions included: Who is the second suspect? Who else may have helped carry out the attack? What were the plans behind it? Where did Mr. McVeigh spend recent months? When was the bomb built? What was the specific target of the blast? (Weiner, 1995b).

Furthermore, even though a friend of McVeigh's was quoted as saying that 'Mr. McVeigh had returned believing that the Army had implanted a computer chip in his buttocks in order to keep him under surveillance,' there was no suggestion on the part of *The New York Times* that one who made such a claim might be mentally ill or at least unbalanced. Not raising this issue seems more glaring in light of the many, many questions they did ask about McVeigh.

Time magazine's initial coverage of McVeigh, a cover story, followed the pattern set by *The New York Times*. Neither offered significant speculation on McVeigh's mental state. *Time*'s coverage also mirrored that of *The New York Times* in casting McVeigh's alleged abnormalities as politically motivated. For example, rather than simply labeling McVeigh 'paranoid,' he was seen as politically paranoid, a characteristic which he was said to share with other militia members. *Time* said of McVeigh and the militias: 'It is clear that the members, along with those in similar groups throughout the country, nurture a profound paranoia about the federal government even as they express their deepest patriotism.'

This article also detailed McVeigh's failed attempt to join the Army's Special Forces. According to *The New York Times*, McVeigh: '...saw his cherished hope of becoming a Green Beret shattered by psychological tests. It was apparently a blow so crushing that he quit the Army and went into a psychic tailspin' (McFadden, 1995a). From reading the article one might reasonably have raised questions as to the impact of this failure on his mental state and normalcy, yet *The Times* skirted the issue by not following it up with any suggestion that McVeigh's 'psychic tailspin' could have degenerated into mental illness, perhaps leading him to commit the acts which he later was convicted of.

The deaths of the children were again mentioned in *Time*'s May 8 cover story: 'Even when confronted last week with photographs of the children carried from the crumpled Alfred P. Murrah federal building—some bloody and numb with shock, others already dead—McVeigh appeared unshaken. The accused bomber seems to have decided that he is a prisoner of war' (Gleick, 1995a). McVeigh's lack of emotion obviously raised

some eyebrows, but no speculation in regard to his mental state. His alleged actions were repeatedly cast in a political context.

When he was sentenced to death in June of 1997 it was front-page news. And *The New York Times* again pointed out McVeigh's stoicism and lack of remorse without questioning the issue of his normalcy: 'The prosecutors did not mention the killer's apparent lack of remorse, but it seemed evident in the courtroom: Mr. McVeigh never shed a tear during heart-wrenching testimony that had men and women on the jury weeping and reaching for their handkerchiefs' (Thomas, 1997b). *Time* offered post-conviction comment on McVeigh as well, continuing the pattern set early on and followed by both print media sources under consideration. None of the three articles in the June 16, 1997, edition of *Time* posed questions regarding McVeigh's normalcy. McVeigh was cast as a revolutionary or wayward patriot, sincerely motivated by anger over the Federal assault at Waco.

In contrast to Kaczynski, McVeigh was consistently defined as a politically and ideologically motivated actor. In *The New York Times's* initial front page article the destruction of the Murrah Federal Building was placed in a right-wing context: 'The date, as the fiery end of the Federal siege of the Branch Davidian compound, had become a defining moment and rallying cry for scores of armed right-wing paramilitary groups.' The bombing of the Murrah Federal Building was understood to be a politically inspired act, driven by right-wing ideology. McVeigh and the right were also motivated by anger over Waco. *The New York Times* laid out the grievances of the militias: they oppose gun control, taxes, The United Nations, and the 'New World Order' (McFadden, 1995b). Other articles that appeared April 22 echoed these themes, as they would throughout both publications coverage of McVeigh.

Time's May 1, 1995, cover story focused on the blast at the Murrah Building, paying attention to McVeigh. His alleged actions were situated as politically motivated. *Time* too presented a long list of militia grievances, then highlighted 'the movement's twin tragedies,' one of them being Waco. *Time* followed the pattern established by *The New York Times*: McVeigh's alleged actions were cast as politically and ideologically motivated and he was located within the context of a wider right-wing movement (Gleick, 1995b).

The Oklahoma City bombing was also situated as a political act on the front page of *The New York Times* on May 28, 1995, in which letters written by McVeigh to his hometown newspaper were presented as giving insight into his political motivation (Rimer 1995). In contrast, when Kaczynski's writing was analyzed it was said to reveal, and actually be evidence of, abnormality and mental illness. Subsequent *New York Times* articles made reference to McVeigh's 'political views' (Belluck, 1995), his 'political anger,' (Kifner, 1995a), his 'political philosophy' and his 'search for ideological converts' (Kifner, 1995b). The portrayal of McVeigh was that of a politically and ideologically motivated actor. Even when he was convicted he was still presented as a politically and ideologically motivated actor and was placed in the context of, and linked to, a wider right-wing/militia movement (Thomas, 1997a).

On June 3, 1997, The *Times* ran an interesting article in which speculation was offered as to why the trial was not followed closely by the nation. Why were we not riveted as we were in the O.J. case? Obviously, the trial was not televised, but more than this, according to The *Times*, there was another factor: 'And anyway, the weight of all those people killed—all those children—by a bomber in the service of ideology was too heavy' (Goodman, 1997). Throughout, both *The New York Times* and *Time* presented McVeigh as a politically and ideologically motivated actor. *The New York Times* presented McVeigh in this light, not only in the text of articles, but in headlines as well: 'Political Ideas of McVeigh are Subject at Bomb Trial' (Thomas, 1997c). Predictably, *Time* also continued to portray McVeigh as politically motivated, casting him as a would-be revolutionary:

He spends most of his time in jail reading the piles of mail he receives. He also reads books. Last month it was Somerset Maugham's *The Razor's Edge*, and he is now finishing *Man's Fate* by Andre Malraux. A book about a young man's spiritual quest and one about revolutionaries—McVeigh must be taking both seriously. (Collins, 1997)

Conclusion

The specific empirical focus of this investigation of the intersection of mass media and medicalization was to assess whether or not mainstream media presentations displayed a dichotomous standard in the use and application of medical terminology as an explanation of the actions of Ted Kaczynski and Tim McVeigh: To what did the media attribute the actions of Kaczynski and McVeigh? Were the actions of one more likely to be attributed to political and ideological motivation? Were the actions of one more likely to be attributed to psychological abnormality?

The main implications of the media's uneven application of medical terminology as an explanation of the actions of Kaczynski and McVeigh lie in social control. The media play a powerful role in modern American society by shaping public perception. Much of what we think we know about the world comes from the media. In short, it plays a large role in the construction of reality for most people. The media have the power to frame, portray, and define, and as such are one of the most powerful social control agents.

What is social control? According to Conrad and Schneider, the conflict perspective 'defines social control as a political mechanism by which certain groups can dominate others' (1980:21). Speaking more specifically, they identify medical social control as 'the acceptance of a medical perspective as the dominant definition of a certain phenomenon' (242). More specific still, they identify a specific type of social control, 'medical ideology,' which involves defining a behavior or condition as an illness primarily because of the social and ideological benefits accrued by conceptualizing it in medical terms (245). They make it clear that 'disease designations can support dominant social interests and institutions' (245).

Several authors have noted the use of mental illness labels to depoliticize, and thus neutralize, political opponents or critics. According to Bloch and Reddaway, the first recorded instance in which psychiatric means were used to depoliticize dissent occurred in Russia in 1836, when philosopher Pyotr Chaadayev wrote a 'philosophical letter' critical of Nicholas I, who responded by declaring him officially insane (1985:133). Conrad and Schneider cite the use in the United States of the medical label 'drapetomania,' which was said to be a disease which caused slaves to run away from their masters (1980). And they note that Nazi leaders defined their political opponents as mentally ill before ordering their death (1980). Both Conrad and Schneider and Bloch and Reddaway discuss the political use of mental illness designations in Soviet Russia. According to Conrad: 'This strategy served to neutralize the meaning of political protest and dissent, rendering it the ravings of mad persons' (Conrad, 1987: 67). The most

in-depth analysis of Soviet use of the mental illness label as a tool of social and political control comes from Bloch and Reddaway, however, who note that there were about 500 documented cases between the 1960s and 1980s of Soviet dissidents being defined by the state as mentally ill. It is worth pointing out that schizophrenia was the medical label most often applied to Soviet dissidents, and was one of the labels applied to Ted Kaczynski. As they put it: 'The state, with the aid of psychiatrists, can thus discredit and effectively silence people who oppose its policies...Manipulated in this manner, political protest turns into a psychiatric issue' (1985: 130). To date, however, little research has paid attention to the intersection of media and medicalization with regard to depoliticization and social control, though several researchers have noted the role of the media in medicalization processes, as noted earlier in this article.

While the examples cited above are seemingly obvious uses of medicalization in the service of ideology, the Kaczynski and McVeigh cases are perhaps more subtle. Why might Kaczynski's actions and critique be defined as more threatening to elite interests, and therefore in need of neutralization, than those of McVeigh? Kaczynski was a revolutionary in both lifestyle and intellect, representing a definite ideological and symbolic threat to dominant interests, including those of the owners of commercial mass media organizations such as *The New York Times* and *Time*. His bombs may have caused terror indeed, but the real threat lie in his ideas; in his well-articulated, forceful, and whether one agrees with his conclusions or not, coherent critique of industrial society. In contrast, McVeigh's political 'critique' was confined to the policies of the United States Government. And, though McVeigh committed a violent and symbolic act against the United States Government, he was not a revolutionary. He did not critique commercial interests, capitalism, advancing and potentially dehumanizing, or even life-threatening, technology, or industrial society, as Kaczynski did. Timothy McVeigh articulated nothing beyond his passionate distrust of government. Perhaps it is precisely because he was not a revolutionary that he was presented by the commercial mass media as a politically and ideologically motivated actor.

The medicalization of Kaczynski served a social control function in that his ideology and actions were not held out to the public as examples of politically motivated behavior from which like-minded others could draw. Were his actions not medicalized his ideas could have served as a cognitive tool or resource for those desiring radical social transformation. Because he was defined as psychologically abnormal or ill, however, his comments were not worthy of serious consideration. If '*Industrial Society and Its Future*' were written by a madman then we need not pay attention. In applying the label, 'mentally ill,' or 'schizophrenic,' Ted Kaczynski's ideas and his serious and scholarly critique of industrial society were neutralized. Mass media and the medicalization of deviance merge in the case of Ted Kaczynski, serving as a mechanism of ideological social control.

Thus, one of the main implications of dichotomized media coverage with regard to McVeigh and Kaczynski is that current social arrangements were reinforced and legitimized. Conrad has identified medicine as 'a de facto agent of the status quo' (1987:

67). With regard to McVeigh and Kaczynski, however, medical language was used by the media rather than the medical profession itself, which was only marginally involved. The medicalization of Ted Kaczynski took place on what Conrad has identified as the conceptual level, wherein a medical vocabulary or model is used to define and make sense of the problem, condition, or act in question. When medicalization occurs on this level, medical professionals may be only marginally involved and medical treatments may not be used (1992). This level of medicalization is most applicable to the present research, in which *The New York Times* and *Time* were more likely to use a medical vocabulary to define and describe Kaczynski than McVeigh, and medical professionals such as psychiatrists were marginally involved. The claims of psychiatrists or other medical professionals were infrequently cited, rather, the media themselves generally applied medical labels. In this exercise of power they defined the situation.

Talking specifically about medicalization, Conrad and Schneider say, 'The greatest social control power comes from having the authority to define certain behaviors, persons, and things' (1980: 8). This comparative analysis represents the intersection of mass media and the medicalization and depoliticization of deviant behavior. The media, already an institution with the power to frame and define reality, also used the authority of medical language and terminology to medicalize, depoliticize, and neutralize Ted Kaczynski, transforming what he claimed was political protest into a psychiatric issue. As Conrad said, 'the key issue is definitional' (1992: 216). Steen takes this statement a bit further in saying that 'The definition that comes to prevail, be it a legal, moral, political, or medical definition, determines in large part how society will view the individuals engaging in problem behaviors' (2001: 327). Finally, Szasz adds a point most germane to this article: to 'classify another person's behavior is usually a means of constraining him' (1970: 213). Of course, some classifications or labels are more constraining than others. While Tim McVeigh was defined as a criminal, political ideology and motivation were attributed to him, whereas the 'mental illness' or 'schizophrenic' label applied to Kaczynski was constraining in that it served to depoliticize and neutralize his critique of modern industrial society. Kaczynski too was defined as a criminal, but one whose actions were a manifestation of mental illness, therefore rendering his critique invalid and not worthy of serious consideration.

When an action or behavior is medicalized, other possible social sources, explanations, and causes are downplayed or ignored altogether. For example, Carrier argues that learning disability theory 'misrecognizes and thus masks the effects of social practices and hierarchy,' serving not only to obfuscate, but to deflect attention from issues of power and privilege, thereby reinforcing the status quo (1983: 952). This dynamic has been identified in regard to other problems as well, such as battering, thereby deflecting attention from issues of patriarchy and social inequality (Conrad, 1992).

Just as other explanations for the behavior or action in question are ruled out, so too is will and motivation. When behavior is interpreted as being caused by illness the social actor is stripped of his or her capacity to act with will or motivation. When Ted Kaczynski is said to be 'sick,' 'crazy,' or 'schizophrenic,' he is relieved of his agency,

precluding the possibility that his actions, though illegal, were the result of deliberate political protest; 'an intentional repudiation of existing political arrangements' (Conrad, 1992: 251). Timothy McVeigh, however, despite being responsible for far more death and destruction, was granted agency by the media.

Another aspect of media coverage that resulted in the medicalization of Ted Kaczynski, with implications for social control, involves the media's use of medical terminology and the medical model. According to Conrad and Schneider, the 'medical model and the associated medical designations are assumed to have a scientific basis and are treated as if they are morally neutral' (1980: 35). Medical judgments are assumed to be objective, value-free, rational, scientific diagnoses rather than political or moral judgments. Again, such notions serve a social control function by masking the inherently political nature of the definitional process. Conrad and Schneider point out that 'medical designations are social judgments and the adoption of a medical model of behavior is a political decision' (1980: 35). The political nature of medical designations is covered over by the assumed objectivity of the medical model. The result of interpreting criminal acts in medical terms 'is to depoliticize and remove moral judgment from the behavior in question. Much as the label "crime" allows no attention to the social environment, "sickness" removes the offending act and actor even farther from any political and ethical context' (Conrad & Schneider, 1980: 222). The act, person, or condition is depoliticized, and public discourse about important social issues and problems, such as environmental destruction and the role of technology in modern industrial society, both major concerns of Kaczynski's, is downplayed or ignored.

As demonstrated in the research findings reported here, both *The New York Times* and *Time* were more likely to medicalize the actions of Ted Kaczynski than Tim McVeigh, leading me to refer to 'the medicalization of Ted Kaczynski.' As Conrad points out, however, the process of medicalization is rarely complete and should properly be thought of as occurring on a continuum in which we think of medicalization not as an either-or, dichotomous phenomenon, but as a process occurring in degrees. Conrad utilizes the notion of 'degrees of medicalization' (1992: 220).

Though he notes that we lack a clear understanding of the factors that impact degrees of medicalization, the existence of competing definitions is crucial. The qualitative portion of this article displayed quite clearly the existence of competing definitions of Kaczynski. Though he was more likely to be medicalized than McVeigh, his medicalization was not complete. Specific claims rejecting the medicalization of Kaczynski were present in *The New York Times* and *Time*. At various points Kaczynski was defined as a politically and ideologically motivated actor.

I now return to Herman and Chomsky's notion of 'dichotomous coverage.' As noted earlier, though they most fully apply this analysis to coverage of international events, they have found it useful in understanding media presentation of domestic events as well. However, it has not been used to understand coverage of individuals who claim to have committed domestic political crimes in the name of different ideologies.

Does their idea aid our understanding of media coverage of Timothy McVeigh and Ted Kaczynski? Broadly speaking, the concept of dichotomous coverage seems to explain the coverage fairly well. The thrust of their work relies on the idea of dichotomous media coverage, whereby broadly similar situations or individuals are covered differently based upon their relation to elite commercial interests. Their work anticipates the general dynamics I have presented throughout this article. Cases broadly similar except for the respective ideologies claimed by McVeigh and Kaczynski garnered different media coverage. *The New York Times* and *Time* treated McVeigh and Kaczynski differently.

But the present research built on their perspective in two ways. First, as I stressed throughout my qualitative analysis, though Kaczynski was more likely to be medicalized than McVeigh, coverage was far from monolithic. Throughout the coverage of both McVeigh and Kaczynski, but especially Kaczynski, competing definitions of their behavior were to be found. The medicalization of Kaczynski was not complete. Possible public understanding of Kaczynski as a politically and ideologically motivated actor was not completely sealed off. Kellner (1990) has critiqued Herman and Chomsky's work as instrumentalist, opting instead for a hegemonic conception of mass media coverage which takes into account media presentations and definitions that challenge established and accepted interests. In light of the qualitative analysis presented in this article, Kellner's point is instructive.

Appendix

Words and phrases used by *The New York Times* and *Time* to describe the mental state of Kaczynski and McVeigh:

Kaczynski

- methodological madman

- mental illness
- delusional
- tortured mind
- mentally ill
- psychosis
- hate-fueled obsessive
- paranoid schizophrenic
- sociopath
- pathological alienation
- mental defect defense
- paranoid
- monster from the Id
- maniacal
- crazy
- twisted
- mental problems

- sick
- madman
- mad genius
- unbalanced
- pathologically shy
- brilliant sociopath
- disturbed
- demented
- psychological demons
- nuts
- personality pushed over the edge
- striking out at demons
- kills to satisfy inner psychological need

McVeigh

- pathological hatred
- bizarre
- human madness
- obsessed
- crazed
- mind snapped
- unstable
- sick
- kook
- he went crazy

- psychotic
- paranoid
- deteriorated mentally
- fanatic
- nuts
- abnormal (love of guns)
- psychological deterioration

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